



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION III  
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For use in February 1999

## **1999 IS THE YEAR FOR WATER SUPPLIERS TO TELL YOU WHAT'S IN YOUR DRINKING WATER**

**by W. Michael McCabe, Regional Administrator**

Do you know where your drinking water comes from? Do you know what's in the water you drink every day? How good is the water in that small town where your son or daughter attends college or where the family goes on vacation? The public has a right to know.

Most Americans drink safe water. Soon we will be able to find out how safe through new Environmental Protection Agency requirements for water systems - - those who supply household water - - to begin telling people what is in their drinking water.

Think of it as a nutrition label on your kitchen faucet, divulging to you, the customer, everything in the water, from low levels of lead and copper, to pesticides, disinfectants and chemicals.

All community water providers must send consumer confidence reports to customers by October 1999, and update them at least once a year. The information will be in an easy-to-read table. Some cities, including Philadelphia, are ahead of schedule, and have already issued their first annual report on water quality.

Annual consumer confidence reports required by EPA are the first new drinking water regulations in several years. In his state of the union address in 1998, President Clinton announced an initiative to speed the restoration of the nation's rivers, lakes and coastal waters, and promised he would do his best to ensure that all Americans receive safe drinking water.

The annual consumer confidence reports fulfill that promise. They will not replace standard purification efforts or boil-water alerts issued when water becomes contaminated and unsafe to drink. Rather, they are a supplement to let people know which particular chemicals, minerals, and other microscopic material might be in their water.

- more -

*Customer Service Hotline: 1-800-438-2474*

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This new rule was developed in consultation with water suppliers, environmental groups, and state regulatory agencies. The consumer confidence reports will include:

- \* the source of water, and its susceptibility to contamination.
- \* a table showing any contaminants detected compared to safe levels in drinking water.
- \* how the company tests its water quality.
- \* information on any possible health effects from contaminants detected.
- \* the water company's telephone number and EPA's toll-free safe drinking water hotline at 1-800-426-4791.

The new reports may also contain additional information about historical facts, plant tours, watershed initiatives, treatment upgrades or plant expansions, and even conservation techniques. Each water system has a unique story to tell.

Water suppliers should use this new "full disclosure" rule as stepping stone to better satisfied customers, not a roadblock. It is both a responsibility and good business strategy to tell customers what they are buying.

This year is the 25th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the law that was created to help protect and provide clean, safe drinking water. As the public's understanding grows, public participation in the protection and delivery of safe drinking water will increase, just as recycling grew from a good idea to a standard practice.

So when you get a special brochure in your water bill, take the time to look at it. Study it, save it, and if you have questions, call your water supplier and get the answers. You have a legal right to know.

For additional information about water quality and consumer confidence reporting, check out EPA's website at [www.epa.gov/ogwdw/ccr/ccrfact.html](http://www.epa.gov/ogwdw/ccr/ccrfact.html).

**EDITOR'S NOTE: Feel free to use this op-ed in entirety or an edited version. Please call Bonnie Smith at (215) 814-5543 if you have questions, or want the author's photo or the Safe Drinking Water Act's 25th anniversary logo.**